

Study R16 - Whitewater and River Boating Report

Presented to the Oroville Relicensing
Recreation and Socioeconomics Work Group
January 29, 2004

Study Objectives

- Identify existing recreational boating opportunities associated with the Feather River in the study area.
- Identify & assess ways to maintain & enhance river-related recreational experiences for appropriate water-related activities.

Study Area

Two reaches of the Feather River:

1. **Upper reach** – North Fork arm of Lake Oroville
 - contains the Big Bend whitewater run
 - Put-in at PG&E Poe Powerhouse (outside of FERC Project 2100 boundary)
 - Take-out at Dark Canyon Car-top BR

2. **Lower reach** – from Oroville Dam to Gridley
 - Divided into 3 segments
 - **Segment 1** – Diversion Pool
 - **Segment 2** – Low Flow Section
 - **Segment 3** – Afterbay Outlet to Gridley

View of put-in at PG&E Poe Powerhouse (outside of FERC Project 2100 boundary)



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Methodology

- **Upper reach:** field reconnaissance, focus group discussion & survey
 - Focus group made up of 11 members of a local whitewater group, the Chico Paddleheads
 - Focus Group topics included Big Bend run, and comparison to other whitewater runs in the area

- **Lower reach:** field reconnaissance, focus group and mail survey
 - Floated by canoe and drift boat (with a guide) from Fish Hatchery to Palm Avenue
 - Focus group and survey topics included trip characteristics, activities, group info, history of use, issues, and suggested improvements for the 3 segments

Methodology (cont'd)

- Stakeholder-Proposed Whitewater Park – focus group discussion and survey
- Other information used included historic lake elevation and flow information to determine when Big Bend run has been runnable

Floating down the Lower Reach



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Key Results

Upper Reach

- Availability of Big Bend run depends on lake elevation
- According to focus group members
 - Max Useable Elevation – 730 feet, if lake is at elevation of 730 ft or less then not enough of the run is exposed to be worth boating
 - Generally use the run Labor Day through early November
- Only in 7 of the last 14 years (between 1988 and 2002) has Lake Oroville reached 730 ft or less
 - Avg days/year = 127, typically between August and December

Key Results

Upper Reach

- Big Bend run is 14 miles long – generally more flatwater paddling than whitewater
- 8 miles of flatwater paddling to take-out at 730 ft lake elevation
- Focus group members would like to shorten the paddle out
 - Options include other take-out locations (found not to be practical) or a water shuttle to take boaters from end of the run to Dark Canyon Car-top BR

Take-out at Dark Canyon



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Key Results

Upper Reach

According to focus group members:

- Big Bend is a class III+ to IV run (intermediate to advanced)
- Big Bend run is comparable to Belden, Chili Bar, Pigeon Point and Sims runs on the East Branch Upper North Fork, S. Fork American, Trinity, and Upper Sacramento Rivers.
- Run is also comparable to NFFR runs such as Poe, Rock Creek, and Cresta, other NFFR runs and MFFR

Key Results

Lower Reach

Segment 1 (Diversion Pool)

■ Access issues

- Boat launch area is too steep (on Burma Road)
- Gate closes at sunset, want to be able to paddle after dark
- Area for picnicking that is free of manure

Key Results

Lower Reach

Segment 2 (Low Flow Section)

- Access issues
 - Steep/rough launch ramp at Outlet
 - Lack of ramps, take-outs
- Flow Issues
 - Flow in river negatively affecting fish and fishing
- General Issues
 - Jet boats, lack of facilities (toilets, tent camping, phones), illegal fishing & vehicle vandalism

Afterbay Outlet Boat Ramp



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Key Results

Lower Reach

Segment 3 (from Outlet to Gridley)

- **Access Issues**

- Lack of ramps, existing ramps difficult to use

- **Flow Issues**

- Flow in river too low for boating, negatively affecting fish and fishing

- **General Issues**

- Illegal fishing, unsafe boaters, vehicle vandalism, unruly bank fisherman, too much fishing line in the water

Key Results

Stakeholder-Proposed Whitewater Park

Focus group members felt:

- Park could include slalom & rodeo boating, commercial whitewater rafting
- On-shore activities could include picnicking, frisbee, walking, biking, horseback riding, camping and food concessions
- Spectators would be important, could provide contests, demonstrations and classes that spectators could watch

Key Results

Stakeholder-Proposed Whitewater Park

- Focus group members felt the level of demand for the park would be high due to the urban location and availability of park when other whitewater opportunities would not be available
- 9 of 11 respondents said they would use the park once a week or more (6) or once every two weeks (3)

Key Results

Stakeholder-Proposed Whitewater Park

- 3 or 4 Potential Locations
 - Area just below Thermalito Diversion Dam (RWG-LF3, Butte County)
 - Area just below Fish Barrier Dam or Site between the Fish Barrier Dam and Bedrock Park (RWG-LF28, Oroville RDA/ FRLFCA)
 - Along the tailrace channel between the Forebay and Afterbay, near the South Forebay DUA (RWG-LF18, Am. Whitewater/Chico Paddleheads)

Questions?



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